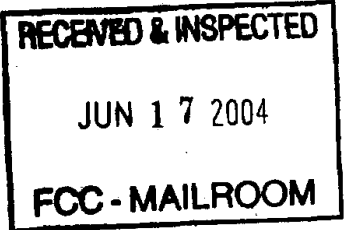


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June 2, 2004

RM-10803

FCC Localism Task Force
Attn: Marlene H. Dortch, Office of the Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St., SW
Washington, DC 20554

Re: Written Comments – Rapid City, South Dakota FCC Localism Hearing

Greetings:

Enclosed are the original and four copies of the written Statement of James D. Leach at the FCC Localism Hearing held May 26 in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Very truly yours,

James D. Leach

JDL/jlo
Enclosures
cc: Qualex International (two copies)
Tierra Ford (two copies)

No. of Copies rec'd 014
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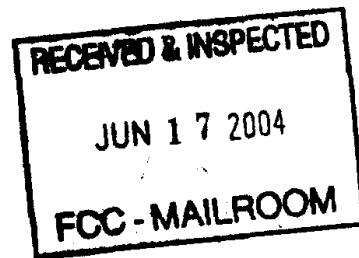
RM-10803

STATEMENT OF JAMES D. LEACH

FCC LOCALISM HEARING

MAY 26, 2004

Rapid City, South Dakota



My name is Jim Leach. I'm here as a citizen.

We have a problem in South Dakota. In October, 2002, we had a hotly contested election for United States Senate.

Native Americans registered to vote in that election in larger numbers than they ever had before, although still far short of registration of non-Indians. They were met with allegations of "voter fraud." The allegations were unfounded, yet South Dakota media – print and broadcast alike – repeated these allegations over and over and over again, in an incessant drumbeat over the last 30 days of the campaign. This was pack journalism at its worst.

The election came and went.

The South Dakota Attorney General, local Sheriffs, and local Auditors have all said there were no problems in the election.

No election or law enforcement official has alleged that even one fraudulent ballot was cast, or that anyone even attempted to cast a fraudulent ballot.

What is the relevance of this now?

The allegations of "voter fraud" against Native Americans harm the election process in three ways:

- They are insulting and discouraging to Native Americans.
- They resulted in a new "voter identification" law which will make it harder for Native Americans to vote, because many Native Americans do not carry government-issued identification cards, and may be intimidated by being asked to sign a separate identification affidavit.
- They caused public perception among non-Indians that "voter fraud"

is rife among Native Americans.

Commissioner Copps, you asked earlier this evening whether there is a relationship between media concentration and political participation. South Dakota's experience is a perfect example of this connection. The domination of print and broadcast media in South Dakota by a few sources who listen mainly to each other resulted in a false story being perpetuated, to the detriment of minority participation in the 2002 election and future elections.

Commissioner Adelstein, you asked whether more concentration of media ownership is in the public interest. In South Dakota, we have too much concentration of media ownership now. The smaller the number of owners, the smaller the media pack, and the harder for those not part of it to be heard.

If you want a model of true localism, look at KILI-FM radio in Porcupine on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation. KILI is the model the FCC should strive to encourage.

To all South Dakota television and radio media, thank you for all you do for this community, but please also look at your role in perpetuating the myth of Native American "voter fraud" through your endless repetition of "sexy" stories which lack a basis in fact. Such conduct fails to serve the public interest.

None of us can change the past, but each of us can change the future. The 2002 "voter fraud" stories about Native Americans are already starting to be repeated in the current election cycle, as shown in the attached April 24, 2004, Rapid City Journal article.

This election, serve the public interest by

- demanding hard evidence instead of printing speculation, rumor, and innuendo,
- be sure the amount of coverage you give any such stories is only in proportion to what they actually deserve, and
- ask yourself about the motives of those who push on you stories about Native American "voter fraud."

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Oglala Sioux's Senator

Republican John Thune threw in the towel on his South Dakota Senate race yesterday, notwithstanding the suspicious circumstances under which he lost by a mere 524 votes. We think that at a minimum he owed his many supporters a recount.

If nothing else, a recount would have put on the public record the dubious details of how he lost, if that's the word for what happened. Under state law the close margin entitled him to a recount, and these have been common in South Dakota's closely fought elections. Democrats Tom Daschle and George McGovern both used them to secure victories to Congress.

Moreover, Mr. Thune clearly thinks there was something fishy about last week's vote. "Are there questions that need to be answered about the outcome of this election? I believe there are," he noted in yesterday's statement. "Did things happen that shouldn't have in some polling places around the state? I believe they did. Some of these issues would be resolved through a recount. However, others, though unethical, would not be righted through a recount."

Allow us to translate: Yes, Mr. Thune thinks the election was probably stolen, but he'll have a hard time proving it, won't win in the end anyway and along the way he'll be so beat up by Tom Daschle's political machine that he'd never be able to run for statewide office again. He's only 41 years old, so better to walk than fight. That may sound cynical, but what else are his supporters to make of that ripe phrase, "though unethical"?

We know, for example, that Mr. Thune was leading all during Election Night, until late Wednesday morning when results flowed in from Shannon County; suddenly he trailed by about 500 votes. Last minute landslide precincts are suspicious on their face, a legendary practice in places like Chicago.

But Michael New, a post-doctoral fellow at the Harvard-MIT Data Center, has inspected the South Dakota Secretary of State's Web site to discover other striking facts: While Democrat Tim Johnson ran statewide about 12 percentage points behind what Mr. Daschle got in his 1998 Senate victory, in Shannon County Mr. Johnson ran about 12 percentage points *ahead*. He got 92% of the vote compared with Mr. Daschle's 80%. Nowhere else in the state did Mr. Johnson improve his vote share relative to Mr. Daschle.

Senate voter turnout was up 27% statewide for this year's close contest compared with

1998, but in Shannon County turnout increased by 89%. Again, no other county in the state showed comparable turnout increases. Shannon County is largely Indian country, home to the Oglala Sioux nation, and is heavily Democratic. But Mr. Thune managed to receive only nine more votes there than did Mr. Daschle's opponent in 1998, notwithstanding the much larger turnout.

Mr. New points out that this is just a 4% increase in GOP votes over 1998. In the other three South Dakota counties where Indians constitute more than two-thirds of the population, Mr. Thune gained between 23% and 43% more votes than the GOP candidate in 1998. The Oglala Sioux would seem to give new meaning to the phrase "bloc voting."

As Mr. New concedes, "this could all be a coincidence." But "this trifecta of late results, high turnout and unusually strong support for the Democratic nominee should, if nothing else, arouse suspicion."

By the way, we're told that Mr. Thune's lawyers have affidavits from about 50 people attesting to voting irregularities, including from four Indians saying they were each paid \$10 to vote. Then there's this week's report of the pending arrest of Becky Red Earth-Villeda, also known as Maka Duta, for allegedly forging absentee-ballot applications. She'd been hired by the South Dakota Democratic Party to recruit voters and denies the charges. But how many smoke signals does it take to wonder if there's also fire?

We understand Mr. Thune is reluctant to risk his future career by seeming ungracious, but he also an obligation to his thousands of donors and volunteers and especially to the principle of honest elections. Every phony ballot is one that cancels someone else's franchise. And we doubt Mr. Johnson would have turned the same cheek. Virtually at the moment Shannon County's results were reported Wednesday, Mr. Johnson was declaring that the election was over and that "Every vote was counted, every vote was counted correctly."

Happy simply to have regained Senate control, Republicans are letting Mr. Thune walk away from an election challenge, much as John Ashcroft did in 2000. But the world should know that Democrats won at least two seats in highly suspicious, if not crooked, fashion. First they changed the election rules in New Jersey to throw Bob Torricelli over the side once he fell behind in the polls. And now we have Tim Johnson's miraculously large and last-minute Oglala Sioux turnout. And the Democrats still lost the Senate.

*Tim Johnson keeps
his seat the Chicago way.*

RESPONSE TO WSJ EDITORIAL "THE OGLALA SIOUX'S SENATOR"

Yesterday's WSJ editorial "The Oglala Sioux's Senator" falsely alleges that Senator Tim Johnson won reelection "in highly suspicious, if not crooked, fashion" because of a "miraculously large and last-minute Oglala Sioux turnout."

John Thune's campaign and the South Dakota Republican party relentlessly drummed the theme of alleged "voter fraud" for weeks before the election. As a result, the Oglala Sioux of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation voted under greater scrutiny from Republicans on Election Day than any other people in South Dakota. Republicans were at every one of the eight polling places on the reservation all Election Day. Not a single Republican poll watcher has alleged "voter fraud" or any other misconduct by anyone.

After the Pine Ridge polls closed, the ballots were driven by Republican and Democratic teams off the reservation, to neighboring Fall River County, to be counted under the eyes, ears, and noses of an all-Republican team of elected officials, headed by the Republican State's Attorney, Lance Russell. Mr. Russell is the former Executive Director of the South Dakota Republican Party; he expressed his thoughts about Senator Johnson in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper two weeks before the election attacking Senator Johnson as "whining" and "disgusting" and challenging him to "stand up like [a] man."

Mr. Russell has not even suggested there was anything suspicious about the Pine Ridge election results. Nor has the Republican Fall River County Auditor, Sherrill

Dryden, who supervised counting the ballots.

Nor have any such allegations been made by any of the other Republicans who control the election and law enforcement process in South Dakota. Republican Attorney General Mark Barnett stated "I don't see any evidence that anybody stole an election from anybody else." (Washington Post, November 7, 2002). Republican United States Attorney James McMahon has made no allegations of any problems with the election. The Republican elections commissioner who oversaw voting and balloting on the Pine Ridge reservation, Renee Dross, stated "we had a huge increase in the number of votes over there, but no problems to speak of." (Washington Post, November 7, 2002). Even Congressman Thune stated "I'm not accusing anyone of stealing the election." (Rapid City Journal, November 14, 2002).

One Republican who monitored a polling place all day on the Pine Ridge reservation, Lynn Kading of Rapid City, said "We've got some real professional gals up here at the table, and they're doing an excellent job." (Rapid City Journal, November 6, 2002).

Considering that no Republican who was actually involved in South Dakota's election--from Congressman Thune to Attorney General Barnett to United States Attorney McMahon to Secretary of State Joyce Hazeltine to State's Attorney Russell to Auditor Dryden to elections commissioner Dross to the Republican poll watchers in the field--alleges any kind of misconduct by anyone, on what evidence does the Wall Street Journal base its allegation that Johnson's reelection was "highly suspicious, if not crooked"?

Apart from unnamed sources who have allegedly "told" the Journal about unspecified "voting irregularities," the Journal cites the pending arrest for forgery of a former independent contractor for the South Dakota Democratic Party, Becky Red-Earth Villeda. Ms. Villeda's activities were the subject of a massive federal and state investigation prior to the election, with which the South Dakota Democratic Party cooperated completely. Extra precautions were taken throughout South Dakota to be sure that the election would not be tainted in any way by anything Ms. Villeda did. No one--not Republican Attorney General Barnett, Republican United States Attorney McMahon, Republican Secretary of State Hazeltine, Republican State's Attorney Russell, Republican Auditor Dryden, Republican elections commissioner Dross, or anyone else--has yet to claim that Ms. Villeda's activities resulted in even one fraudulent ballot being cast.

Which brings us to the other "evidence" cited by the Journal, namely that Native American votes on the Pine Ridge Reservation went very heavily to Johnson over Thune.

Is it possible that Native Americans are smart enough to figure out which candidate respects them more, will do more for them, and is more worthy of their vote? Since the Journal's editorial chose not to examine this possibility, I will do so here.

Democrats historically do more for Native Americans than Republicans do; logically, Native Americans tend to vote heavily Democratic. Senator Johnson has worked harder and done more for Native Americans than Congressman Thune did, on issues including small business development, housing, self-determination, health care, trust reform, clean water, domestic violence, and sexual assault prevention.

As a young Native American from the reservation, Ohitika Tasso, put it, "It's just sort of basic knowledge around here that the Democrats do more for us. . . . The Republicans, they don't even put their signs up on the [reservation]." (Washington Post, November 7, 2002).

In 1996, 85 % of Pine Ridge voters chose Senator Johnson over then-Senator Larry Pressler. In 2000, 85% of Pine Ridge voters chose Gore over Bush. (South Dakota Secretary of State web site). This year, Johnson campaigned on the Pine Ridge reservation the day before the election; Thune never campaigned there. Democrats ran an extensive voter registration and get-out-the-vote effort on all the state's reservations, including Pine Ridge; Republicans had none. In addition, Republican allegations of pre-election "voter fraud" by Native Americans angered Native Americans statewide. Given all this, it's not surprising that voter turnout on the reservations increased significantly (though it still was significantly lower than in the rest of South Dakota), and that Johnson's margin on Pine Ridge increased from 85% in 1996 to 91.6% this year. Thune ceded Pine Ridge to Johnson; the result was unsurprising.

At bottom, the Journal's editorial is based on the premise that Native Americans aren't intelligent enough to do what most other Americans do, namely vote to further what they perceive as their own interests. This premise, and the Journal's utterly unfounded accusations of misconduct by Native American voters, are racism, pure and simple. After what Native Americans have endured at the hands of the dominant non-Native society over the past centuries, and given the challenges they face today, isn't it time this stopped?

Could the Journal become part of the solution instead of part of the problem?

James D. Leach practices law in Rapid City, South Dakota. He was the lead attorney for the South Dakota Democratic Party for the 2002 elections.

A4

Saturday
December 21, 2002

FORUM

Journal ignores racism

By James D. Leach

Leach is a Rapid City attorney, who represented the South Dakota Democratic Party in this year's election.

The Journal's Dec. 12 editorial, "Lott should step down," besides denouncing Sen. Trent Lott, denounces allegations of racism in the "voting irregularities" controversy in South Dakota. The Journal says South Dakotans who allege racism in that controversy are like "the boy who cried wolf," and says their claims are "imagined."

I disagree. Sen. Lott's words are racist, and no one, certainly not me, is defending him. But the Journal's inability to see racism in the ongoing voting charges and publicity is moral myopia.

Actions always speak far louder than words. Should we be more concerned about words like Sen. Lott's that are uttered 2,000 miles away from us, or more concerned about actions in our own state? I say the latter.

Although the Journal doesn't see racial issues in this year's voting controversies, others do. A New York Times editorial on Dec. 10 says, "This year efforts to suppress nonwhite votes were remarkably blatant ... there was a fuss over alleged ballot fraud in South Dakota, clearly aimed at suppressing Native American votes."

If racism doesn't exist, why do we keep hearing about it from Native Americans? Why do so many see racism in the voting controversy? What role does the media, including the Rapid City Journal, play in furthering racism?

The central fact of media coverage of alleged "voter fraud" in South Dakota is gross overkill. Innumerable stories were written and broadcast for a month before the election about the actions of two Native Americans, Lyle Nichols and Becky Red Earth Villeda, who are accused of pre-election wrongdoing, despite the fact that no one in a position of authority has ever claimed that any of their actions affected even one vote.

Some Republicans, including state party chair Joel Rosenthal, pushed this issue relentlessly prior to the election, even though Republican law enforcement and election officials kept saying the wrongdoing was isolated, had not affected any votes, and that safeguards in our voting system would produce a fair election.

The overkill continues. Most recently we have multiple news stories about "50 affidavits" from Republicans about alleged election-day problems. The purveyors of these affidavits refuse to let them see the light of day, claiming unspecified "privacy rights," yet use them to push story after story about alleged "voting fraud" — and the media plays right along by publicizing the unconfirmed, and in most cases uninformed, charges.

'Actions speak louder than words.
Should we be more concerned about words like Sen. (Trent) Lott's that are uttered 2,000 miles away from us or more concerned about actions in our own state? I say the latter. Although the Journal doesn't see racial issues in this year's voting controversies, others do.

— James D. Leach

Based on these affidavits, the right-wing political magazine National Review now calls South Dakota's Senate election "stolen." Republican Attorney General Barnett says the claim is "bunk" and "blather," and that he has yet to receive a single call from any of South Dakota's county auditors reporting election fraud.

Barnett found that exactly one allegation merits further review: a claim that three Native Americans were offered \$10 a vote. The United Press International and National Review stories named a person who supposedly had "witnessed" this, but when this person was interviewed, he said he had only "heard about" it, according to later Argus Leader and Associated Press accounts. In other words, the media reported an unconfirmed rumor, certainly not the first unconfirmed rumor ever to circulate through a small town or reservation.

The difference in this case is that a rumor involving three voters has been spread locally and nationally by Fox News, the National Review, United Press International, the Associated Press, the Argus Leader, and the Rapid City Journal. That publicity creates and fuels public perception that there is a problem, and encourages the people pushing the story to push further such stories, which the media then dutifully reports, creating a self-perpet-

uating cycle of rumor, publicity, and suspicion, all motivated by the belief of some — not all — Republicans that this is a winning political strategy.

The overkill apparently will go on indefinitely, the Journal reports that Republican Party Chair Rosenthal says that state legislators "are certain to address the lingering debate over election practices on American Indian reservations during the Nov. 5 election." In other words, Rosenthal still sees this horse

as a winner, and he and some Republicans will be dressing it up and parading it around in the coming months.

Where's the racism in this? There is a double standard in this state, one standard for Native Americans, the other

standard for everyone else. For example: In Fall River County, hundreds of voter registration applications from Native Americans on the neighboring Pine Ridge Reservation were not processed as required by law. We haven't heard a word about this in the media.

On the Rosebud Reservation, election day attempts to close polling places an hour earlier than allowed by law — and an election-day Republican lawsuit questioning the validity of all ballots cast in the final hour of lawful voting — were transformed into a claim by Republicans that Democrats and Native Americans had tried to do something wrong by keeping the polls open an hour late. This claim was all the more remarkable since on election day Attorney General Barnett, the local Republican state's attorney, and the circuit court judge who heard the Republican lawsuit all said that the polls were properly open as required by South Dakota law.

In Charles Mix County, 22 non-Indian absentee ballots were rejected on Election Day because they were obviously signed by people who were not the people who had applied for them. We have not heard a word about this in the media.

In Minnehaha County prior to the election, Auditor Sue Roust explained to anyone who wanted to listen that her office had received three improper requests for absentee ballots —

all from the Thune campaign. This was never publicized. I don't claim that any of these matters were "voter fraud" or criminal or require changes in our election laws. They were all mistakes. They were all made by non-Indians. The mistakes in Fall River County, the Rosebud Reservation, and Minnehaha County were all made by Republicans; no one knows for sure the political persuasion of the 22 non-Indian absentee voters in Charles Mix County, but they are believed to be Republican. Not a single one of these matters led to even a peep in the media, or a peep from Republican Party Chair Rosenthal. Not a single one has led to a call for any changes in South Dakota election laws. Not a single one is the subject of ongoing news stories about "voter fraud" or attempts to "steal" the election.

Yet unconfirmed conduct far more limited, when allegedly done by Native Americans, is the basis for endless local and national news stories, editorials, and now proposals for legislative change. The public is left with the impression that there were problems on Indian reservations before and during the election, and that changes are needed to stop such problems from happening again.

If for a moment the reader steps into the shoes of a Native American, and sees the world through Native American eyes, how does the reader feel? When I do so, I feel demoralized, because my participation in this election was met with suspicion, accusations, and prejudice. I feel that my people and I are judged by the color of our skin, I feel more distant from non-Indians, and I like them less. I don't think I will ever get a fair shake from them.

The present "voting irregularities" issues is a good opportunity for all of us to reassess what we assume about Native Americans as a group of people, and how our assumptions color how we read news stories. It's a great opportunity for South Dakota media to reassess how it covers issues involving Indians differently than it covers issues involving non-Indians, and how its coverage shapes public perception of Native Americans and influences the present and future all South Dakotans share.

Condemning Sen. Lott's racism, as the Journal does, is fine — except when it is used as a justification for ignoring racism here in South Dakota.

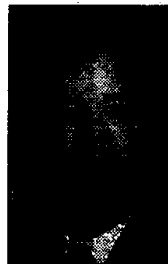
Rapid City Journal 4/24/04 FRONT PAGE

Voter registration charges, denials fly

By Kevin Woster
Journal Staff Writer

Election officials and law enforcement authorities are keeping close watch on voter registration projects in north Rapid City after reports that two convicted felons were being paid to specifically sign up Democrats.

Pennington County Auditor Julie Pearson said Friday that she and her staff had not found any fraudulent registration forms. But she said she is being especially vigilant because of a well-publicized case of voter registration fraud in the county two years ago.



Randy
Frederick



Judy Olson
Duhamel

Pearson also grew concerned after officers from the Pennington County Sheriff's Office notified her that two people with criminal records had been working the North Rapid area to register voters.

"We were notified that someone has hired two people to register voters who are convicted felons," Pearson said. "We heard they were only being paid to register Democrats."

Pearson said she couldn't confirm that information and also said that the registration forms she has been receiving seem to be from a reasonable mix of political parties.

"Most of the North Rapid registrations are coming in as Democrats. But that would be common of North Rapid," she said. "It has more registered Democrats than Republicans."

It isn't illegal for convicted felons to register voters, Pearson said. Nor is it illegal for

voter registration workers to be paid on a per-head basis for their registration work. In fact, state elections supervisor Kea Warne of Pierre said state law doesn't prohibit registration workers from paying people to register.

"It is legal. There's nothing in state law that would prohibit paying people to register. You just can't pay a voter to go vote," Warne said.

Legal or not, paying for a registration signature — especially weighted toward one party — is a method that increases the potential for fraud and unfairly distorts the registration process, South Dakota Republican Party chairman

Randy Frederick said. The fact that convicted felons could be involved also is unsettling, as is the fact that the registration work seems to be aimed at Democratic voters, he said.

Frederick stopped short of accusing the Democratic Party of sanctioning such techniques. But he did refer to the forgery charges brought two years ago against a voter registration worker who had contracted with the South Dakota Democratic Party. State prosecutors eventually dropped eight counts of forgery they had filed against Rebecca Red Earth-Villeda of Flandreau.

See **Voter**, Page A7

Voter: History makes it concern

From Page A1

In an apparently unrelated case, Lyle Nichols of Rapid City pleaded guilty to a felony charge involving voter registration work he did for the United Sioux Tribes. He served 54 days in jail.

Frederick said that history makes the registration irregularities more of a concern.

"We do not know where this is coming from, but I think it's pretty clear that this seems to be leaning in one particular direction," he said. "That (2002 incident) is what makes this whole thing suspect, because this is a very familiar scenario. We've seen this type of thing before."

Judy Olson Duhamel, chairwoman of the South Dakota Democratic Party, said the party wasn't involved in the current voter registration work in Rapid City. Officials for Democratic U.S. Sen. Tom Daschle and Democratic congressional candidate Stephanie Herseth also said their campaigns were not involved in the voter registration in question.

Olson Duhamel said it was "an outrageously bum rap" to imply that her party was involved.

"I can speak for South Dakota Democrats clearly in saying that the state party would never authorize or sanction anything like this. Even when we are registering, we never push one party versus the other," she said. "I resent whoever these people are who are doing this kind of thing and pretending they have some Democratic support somewhere."

Republicans have made an issue of voter fraud since the 2002 Senate campaign, when incumbent Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson topped Republi-

can challenger John Thune by a mere 524 votes. A stronger-than-normal voter turnout on South Dakota Indian reservations, which strongly supported Johnson, was considered an important factor in that victory.

Some conservative Republicans made charges of voter fraud or ballot-box stuffing on reservations after the election. But state Republican officials — including former Attorney General Mark Barnett, Secretary of State Chris Nelson and auditors in key reservation counties — said the voter tally was legitimate and rebuffed continuing claims of fraud by conservative commentators, including the nationally syndicated Robert Novak.

Jim Leach, a Rapid City lawyer hired by the Democratic Party in 2002 to help assure legal compliance in voter registration, said the party and especially American Indians were unfairly slandered by conservatives two years ago.

"In 2002, Native Americans and Democrats were plagued by wild, unfounded rumors," Leach said. "And now this sounds like more wild, unfounded rumors. I have to wonder where these false rumors come from."

Frederick said his party wasn't in the rumor business but wanted to be sure that the registration process was free from the kinds of problems that surfaced during the 2002 campaign. He noted an investigation announced this week by the Codington County Sheriff's Office over questionable voter registration forms received by the auditor there.

According to the Associated Press, the investigation involves voter registration forms received by the county audi-

tor's office on April 16. The forms arrived in a white envelope bearing an April 15 Sioux Falls postmark with no return address, auditor Cindy Brugman said. In reviewing the 22 forms, officer workers noticed apparent discrepancies in nine of them, she said.

Warne, who supervises elections for the South Dakota secretary of state, said she is following the Watertown investigation. She said she has also received reports of registration workers who got a premium for signing up Democrats.

"We've gotten calls from different areas around the state regarding somebody who said they were registering voters for Democrats," Warne said. "We were informed they'd get more for a Democrat, less for an independent and nothing for a Republican."

Another rumor that has circulated through the conservative media nationally is that one of the registration workers in Rapid City is a convicted killer.

Rapid City police arrested 42-year-old Joseph Prentice at the Cornerstone Rescue Mission on April 11 for refusing to leave the premises. Prentice, who previously served time in the state of Washington for manslaughter, pleaded guilty to the Rapid City charge and also to possession of drug paraphernalia.

Prentice, who couldn't be reached for comment, had stayed at the Corral Motel. Contacted by the Journal, motel owner Earl Buck said he evicted a small group of patrons, including Prentice, for unruly behavior, including heavy drinking. Buck said they told him they were in town to register voters.

But there is no known connection between that group and the Democratic Party. Pearson said it was unclear who hired the voter registration workers in North Rapid.

Olson Duhamel said it would be "absurd and outrageous" to connect them to the Democratic Party.

"I don't know how the Democrats got tucked in there," she said. "We'd never endorse that. We'd be appalled."